

# **EXHIBIT 19**

Dear Honorable Chief Judge Robert J Jonker,

My name is Joseph Brechting, I currently work as an arborist and excavator. I have known Chris for around 5 years, worked with him at The Geek Group (TGG), and have become one of his close friends in that time.

About 5 years ago, I found some of TGGs videos online. I saw a video that included some welding, something I'm well versed in. Once I realized they were located right here in my hometown, I went in for a visit. As I walked in the front door, the first thing I saw was a volunteer at the front desk, as I approached the desk Chris walked up. I said hi to him, and he asked what I was there for. I told him, "I'm here because I can do things better than you guys". He immediately said, "You want to try?" and about 10 minutes later I left to go on my first donation pickup.

After visiting several times, I realized they were struggling to gather membership, raise funds, and keep the doors open. I wanted to do something about that so I started volunteering there a few days a week. After about eight months I began volunteering daily, 9am - 6pm, Monday - Saturday. My responsibilities included building maintenance, teaching welding and machining, and I began refurbishing a giant industrial robot. I worked with Chris side by side to build new demonstration equipment, do long needed repairs so the building could be handicap accessible, and started to mentor several members building projects in fields that were new to them.

In the beginning of 2018 Chris asked me to join the Board of Directors. He wanted someone that could represent the staff's point of view, that saw the daily operations, and could be completely objective and fact-based in their assessment of the lab. Shortly after I joined, a vacancy opened for Treasurer and I was elected to that position. Unfortunately, only a few months after that, the lab was raided. However, being a board member and part of the all-volunteer staff, I was there to witness everything we did to close the lab and shut down the building.

After working as a board member for nearly a year, and then side by side with Chris every day as we shut the lab down, I got to see first-hand the struggles, sweat, blood, and tears that were poured in the lab and surrounding community. I could see what Chris's dream meant to him and the members all over the world, but I remember the constant stress of the lab environment. We hid it well from the members, but there were often days where we were hours away having heat, water, and electricity shut off. In fact, we did not have any heat to the building for more than a month leading up to the raid.

During the closing of the lab, Chris was hurting; we all were. It was devastating to have worked so hard for something to see it ripped away in an instant. You could see the heartbreak take its toll on Chris physically, mentally, and emotionally. The lab was like his child, he had grown and nurtured it for over 25 years. It was hard for the first four months of 2019 as we sold and

practically gave away or scrapped nearly all of the contents of the lab we had worked so diligently to acquire, many of which are irreplaceable.

While the lab was open, Chris made sure the entire staff knew we were there to be a community resource. He constantly emphasized the need to be kind, caring, and learn something from someone else no matter who they were. During power outages, storms, and heatwaves, Chris made sure the building was staffed - sometimes at all hours of the night - to be a shelter for those in need. He did this because other "safe havens" in the area, including the church next door, would lock their doors. After the storms, Chris would often form teams of lab staff to go clean up downed trees or other storm damage. The people in the local area knew this, and would reach out specifically to him for help, and it always came.

There were uncountable instances where Chris, myself, or other staff members would be digging through our own wallets during storms to buy fuel to run the generators. This was all so that the community could come in and warm up, charge their phones, etc. TGG did this despite the fact that many in that same community would vandalize our property and steal anything that wasn't bolted down. We had several instances with neighborhood kids attempting to vandalize the lab building. Once, we spotted a kid trying to mess with the main power feed to the building, something that if you touch would instantly kill you. Instead of getting upset that there was more attempted vandalism or damage to the lab, Chris was much more concerned that the kid was going to get hurt or killed and even made a video explaining why it was dangerous. All of this time, Chris lived in a utility room in the attic of the building, he certainly wasn't doing any of this to make himself more comfortable.

While we did a lot of things for the community, science and technology were TGG's specialty. The biggest thing we did was the "Computers for Families" program which focused on refurbishing old, donated computers and giving them away to people who could not afford them. On Halloween, TGG did a "Computers Not Candy" event and gave away several hundred computers to local kids in the area. These programs helped give the local kids access to technology they were not able to have at home, and some of them were able to graduate because of it.

Another thing that the lab constantly did was school tours. Chris took it as his personal mission to get kids excited about science, technology, and the trades. It was a wonderful experience to see the school kids watch the Tesla Coils fire up and watch it click for them that science could be cool, and more importantly, worth learning about. Chris made sure that he and the other staff would take time to answer every single question the students asked. Additionally, Chris, myself, and another staff member also built a project for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, including a gigantic model volcano with lava, smoke, and all.

Something I admire about Chris is his willingness to drop everything to help people. He would often drop everything he was doing when he heard someone was in need and follow up until he knew they were taken care of. In the Spring of 2021, I experienced this first hand. I work for a

tree service and earlier this year I had part of a tree fall onto my head. I spent 6 days in the intensive care unit in the hospital with a shattered skull and am still suffering the effects of it. Chris was the only person to constantly check in on me and offer help in any way he could. He did this despite going through all of this legal nightmare at the same time. Chris is very similar to me, he always puts himself last. We both put others first, often to our own detriment.

Another thing I admire about Chris is his relentless optimism. TGG was a local non-profit where community service hours could be completed for the court systems. I personally watched several people that did community service with us turn their lives around and even come back after their community service hours were finished just to volunteer with us. The environment at TGG, while sometimes stressful, was always welcoming to anyone who wanted to help, learn, and grow.

Chris may not have been a businessman, but he was a leader. I watched him play up his showmanship to try to bring in more members. I watched him put up a fake facade of being a tough guy because that's what was necessary to run the lab, but in reality, Chris is the exact opposite. Chris's main focus in life is improving the lives of others through education and experience. He is a good person, a kind man, and someone I would absolutely trust with my life.

As a recovering alcoholic, I know people make mistakes - I sure have. It is without a doubt that Chris made a mistake. However, when your child is sick or dying, you will do anything to save them. The lab was Chris's child, his life-long dream, and his entire world. The lab was struggling, and all he was trying to do was save it.

I know it is unimaginably difficult to run a nonprofit like TGG when donations constantly fall through, bills pile up, and you have to maintain a building that was 30 years past its prime. The goal was to make the world a better place. I know Chris did, and is continuing to do so to this day.

I do not wish to deny or make excuses for anything he did, but I don't think locking him up for years is in anyone's best interest, and will in fact be detrimental to the community. I still hear regularly from members and others from the community that are heartbroken over the closing of the lab, and are now realizing the hole that TGG filled in our local community and around the world. TGG, and everyone it brought together, locally and globally, owe a great deal of gratitude to Chris Boden. Thankfully his sentence is not for me to decide, but Your Honor, I hope you take into consideration what I have written when you make your sentencing decision.

Sincerely

Joseph Brechting